DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 287 623 RC 016 347

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TITLE Reorganization and Rancor: The Aftermath of a Troubled Reorganization.
INSTITUTION State Univ. of New York, Ithaca. Coll. of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Cornell Univ.
SPONS AGENCY New York State Legislature, Albany.
PUB DATE Aug 86
NOTE 78p.; For other reports in this series, see ED 276 548, ED 281 694, and RC 016 346-358.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC04 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Role; *Boards of Education; Case Studies; Centralization; *Consolidated Schools; Court Litigation; *Dissent; Educational History; Educational Policy; Elementary Secondary Education; Faculty; Local Issues; Mergers; Rural Education; *Rural Schools; School Community Relationship; School District Autonomy; *School District Reorganization; School District Size; Small Schools; State School District Relationship
IDENTIFIERS *New York; *Satisfaction

ABSTRACT

The Eatonton Central School District of central New York State, formed in 1968 by merging the smaller central districts of Batesville and Meridian, is examined from the period prior to reorganization to the present. The study is divided into three major sections. The first discusses the school district and its setting. Enough of the area's history is reported to provide a sense of the circumstances in which the community, which is predominantly agricultural, developed. The second section covers school district governance, beginning with an overview of the administrations and school boards in the two districts prior to reorganization and continuing with an accounting of the reorganization and the challenges to it. The present-day board of education is then discussed. The third major part looks at the educational leadership in the Eatonton Central School District, the faculty, and the educational environment (including the special education and vocational education opportunities programs provided). Emphasis is placed on the present day, but particular attention is given to the chief school officers and the role each has played in the history of the district. Quotes from residents, teachers, school board members, and others are included. (JMM)

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Reorganization and Rancor: The Aftermath of a Troubled Reorganization

By
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Organizational Alternatives for Small-Rural Schools
In New York State*

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August 1986

*A research project funded by the New York State Legislature (through an appropriation made available to the State Education Department) and the Cornell University Agricultural Experiment Station under provisions of the Hatch Act. The views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect official positions of the funding sources.

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Introduction

The Eatonton Central School District was formed in 1968 by merging two smaller central school districts, Batesville and Meridian. The 1960's were a period of intense reorganization activity in New York State, and the school districts of Batesville and Meridian were just two of many that became part of the movement toward centralization. This case study is the history of Eatonton Central School from the period prior to reorganization to the present.

The study is divided into three major sections. The first of these discusses the school district community and its setting. Emphasis is given to the present day, but enough of the area's history is reported to vie a sense of the circumstances in which the community developed. The second section covers school district governance. Beginning with an overview of the administrations and School Boards in the two districts prior to reorganization, this section continues with an accounting of the reorganization and the challenges to it. This section ends with a discussion of the present day Board of Education.

The third major section of the case study looks at the educational leadership in the Eatonton Central School and the education program. Again, emphasis is placed on the present day, but particular attention is given to the chief school officers and the role each has played in the history of the district.

The Community and Its Setting

Physical Description

The Eatonton Central School District covers over 150 square miles in central New York. The land is fertile and has supported agriculture in many forms for more than 200 years.

Many of the roads which traverse the school district are laid at right angles to each other. These roads were laid out at the end of the Revolutionary War. All of the land in the Eatonton Central School was in a military tract created by the New York Legislature. At some four corners there are groups of houses, but, for the most part, one can drive along the country roads and only see fields and wood lots with an occasional house scattered here and there. There are three major roads which go north and south through the school district. But even these, except in the villages or, as in the case with the route along the western lake shore, are sparsely populated.

The terrain itself is flat or gently rolling for the most part. There are places where the land rises steeply up from either lake, but hills and steep roads are not typical. One gets the impression driving through the district of an area that is tranquil and serene, existing as though passive resistance to the future could prevent too many changes.

The Industrial Base

There is no manufacturing industry in the region. What industry there is is agriculturally-related or service-oriented. There are numerous small businesses which support the communities in a limited way. Included among these are the banks, the grocery stores, the farm supply and implement concerns, the hardware stores and some professional services.

There are still many large farms and a number of small ones throughout the school district. Most of the farms are dairy and cash crop farms, but some raise hogs, goats and sheep. There are several small wineries along each side of the school district. For the most part, these are specialty wineries producing small amounts of wine in limited types. The larger vineyards which are feeling the impact of cut backs in the purchase of grapes by the major wineries are on the south-eastern and western shore of Seneca Lake outside the Eatonton Central School District.

The shores of the Eatonton Central School District have become retreats for many persons who own property along them. Little lake front land is available any longer and many families are holding on to the property they have purchased. The shorelines are dotted with many small summer cottages, large summer homes, and some year-around homes. There are some commercial establishments that rent accommodations and serve meals during the spring and summer months. These establishments plus the hundreds of summer cottages bring a limited number of

tourists to the area. Tourism constitutes a small part of the economy.

Major Community Organizations

The Masons and the Order of the Eastern Star have been active in south Seneca county since the early eighteen hundreds. Many prominent members of the larger community belong to these organizations. At one point there was more than one lodge because of the interest in the organization. Since 1975, however, the Batesville and Meridian chapters have been merged into one chapter. The Masons and the Order of the Eastern Star sponsor several community activities annually and contribute to youth activities in addition to supporting national Mason projects and programs.

The Grange played an integral part in the early life of the county. Today, because of the decline of the agrarian society, the Batesville Grange is not nearly as active nor is its membership as large as previously. In spite of the decline in membership and place in the community the Grange usually undertakes one or more community projects annually. In past years the projects have included numbering all rural mailboxes, painting and repairing churches, and maintaining the Grange Hall as a community center. Yearly projects of the Grange include such events as an election day supper, chicken bar-b-ques, and rummage sales.

One of the most active of the community organizations is the Batesville Historical Society. It was not founded until 1951, but in the past 34 years has compiled a very complete written and pictorial history of the area in addition to organizing a museum.

The museum, while small, is quite complete with both permanent collections and rotating exhibits. The museum is housed on the second floor of the Hinman building in Batesville. The Batesville Library is on the first floor of this building.

The other community organizations in which there is active participation are those serving the children and young people of the community. The various scout organizations are very active as is the 4-H. Each of the villages and some of the smaller communities have active scout troops and 4-H clubs. These organizations provide after-school activities which the younger children, in particular, would not otherwise have.

Community Newspaper

There are three newspapers which cover the news of the school District. The Radisson Reporter covers most of the news including Board of Education meetings, annual meetings and some of the athletic events. The Lake Side Times generally gives more complete coverage to a wider variety of topics. The difference in coverage is reflection of the reporter assignment. The third newspaper is the local weekly, The Batesville Gazette.

The Batesville Gazette has been published since the late 1800s. It is a typical community newspaper covering everything

from birthdays of prominent community members to activities of the Grange to births, deaths, weddings, and anniversaries. The Batesville Gazette is not and has not been reluctant to take a stand on important community issues. It is an important forum for community opinion. Editorials, letters to the editor, and guest columns all provide opportunity for a sharing of positions.

SCHOOL DISTRICT GOVERNANCE

Prior to the 1968 Reorganization

The reorganization of the Batesville Central School and the Meridian Central School into the Eatonton Central School District in 1968 was not the first reorganization either school had gone through. Like most other rural schools in the State, each of the two had been re-structured in the mid-1930's.

On June 8, 1934 residents in ten small common school districts and one union free school district had voted to centralize into the Batesville Central School. Since 1934 five additional districts had been annexed to Batesville to form the district that existed in 1968.

Two years after the formation of the Batesville district the voters in two union free districts and eight common school districts voted to merge and become the Meridian Central School. One additional district was annexed in 1948 to form the district that was merged with Batesville in 1968. (Master Plan for School District Reorganization In New York State--Revised)

The first chief school officer of the Batesville Central School was the man who had been district principal of the Batesville Village School, one of the small common schools which had been centralized since 1927. He continued as chief school officer of the Batesville Central School until 1956. In 1939 John Preston became vice-principal. He would serve in that position until he became district principal in 1961, a position he held until the merger when he took the position as first chief school officer of the Eatonton Central School. For five years from 1956 until 1961, Ralph Fletcher was district principal.

The continuity in administrators was echoed in the School Board members. From 1950 through 1967 ten different persons served on the Board of Education with the average tenure being slightly more than six years. Two persons had served at least seven years, one at least eight, one nine, and one ten. Although the Board of Education records are scant for the years that preceded 1950, some of the people who knew the district and the people who served on the Board of Education after the first centralization remember that some Board members were active for 20 years or more.

The stability in the administration and the school Board seems to reflect a positive relationship with the community. In spite of relatively low levels of state financial support (59.2% from the State; 40.8% from the tax payers), several referenda for new construction projects were approved. Beginning in 1934 with a new building (the one presently being used) the improvement of

district properties continued with the addition of a bus garage in 1942, an addition in 1948, and an elementary wing in 1955. In 1953 land was donated to the school district for additional playing fields that were needed. Not only were referenda for building projects approved by the voters, so were the budgets. No one remembers an annual budget that failed to get approval.

The Meridian Central School records document a similar pattern of long-tenured administrators and Board members and successful passage of construction projects and budgets. Two of the administrators who served in the Meridian Central School cannot remember a time when the budget did not pass. Board of Education members served for long periods of time usually seeking re-election three and sometimes four times. One man served from the time of centralization in 1936 until just before the 1968 merger vote. Although this person holds the District's record for long-term Boardsmanship, several other Board members served more than ten years.

The chief school officer who resigned the year before the reorganization vote in 1968 had been the district principal for 18 years. Two other administrators who had been part of the administrative team continued with the new school district. One of them, the district clerk, eventually became the business manager in the Eatonton District and did not retire until 1985. The second, an elementary principal, served in a "jack-of-all-trades" capacity in the reorganized district, even serving as acting district principal for a five month period.

The two central school districts which merged to become the Eatonton Central School were districts in which the administrators served for a long period of time as did the Board members. Board of Education meetings were short, usually less than two hours as people remember, and focused on routine business matters. Members of the community seldom attended the meetings and when special meetings had to be held they were usually held during the day with an average of three members (enough for a quorum) in attendance. Both districts' records show that the business of running the schools went along without much involvement from the community and with few issues that seemed to divide Board members or place them in the position of not accepting the recommendation of the chief school officer.

After the merger vote, an entirely different picture emerges for the new school district.

Key Political Events in Early School District History

The merging of two or more school districts is seldom a smooth process. Emotions run high with persons taking sides quickly often without thinking through all the issues or even bothering to find out all of the facts for themselves. Once the vote is taken and the merger has become a reality, the pre-merger quarrels are subordinated in most districts to the needs of the fledgling district. Although many voices might continue to say "we never should have merged," activity against the merger usually does not escalate much beyond these mutterings.

Eatonton was an exception. The new district was immediately thrust into a crisis which threatened its very existence and set a course for a series of conflict situations that have plagued the district throughout its history. To be sure, there have been some triumphs--events and people who have brought pride to the school district and the community--but the overriding pattern has been crisis upon crisis as the district has come through the years.

To have an appreciation for the evolving style of school district governance in the Eatonton Central School and a sense of the kind and degree of political participation in that process, it is necessary to review some of the key political events during the early years of the school district's existence.

Reorganization and the Challenges To It

The Initial Effort -- 1963

The earliest attempt to reorganize the Meridian and Batesville Central Schools was begun in March, 1962. On the first of the month a citizens' committee met to consider the centralization of three districts into one. The third district included in the discussions at this point was Thomasville. The procedure for reorganization was discussed and a nominating committee was selected to get a slate of officers for the full committee.

Meetings continued throughout the spring and during the next academic year. The primary impetus for the reorganization

appears to have been two issues: the need to build because of increasing enrollments and the desire to provide more opportunities for the college-bound student. Additionally, the three school districts were targeted for reorganization by the State Education Department in The Master Plan for School District Reorganization.

Although there was a large citizen's committee with several sub-committees, the community and the school Board in Thomasville quickly decided they were against any merger. It is reported in newspaper articles and files on the early merger efforts that the major reason the people in Thomasville were against the centralization was because they thought they would lose the financial value of having the Baton Air Force Base within their district. Federal impact aid had kept the property taxes low and the fear was that if the small district merged with two other districts that the relative value of the federal impact aid would be dissipated and property taxes would rise. The Thomasville Board of Education circulated a letter in the spring of 1963 urging voters in its school district to vote against the reorganization. The effect of the letter coupled with the persons in the other two districts who were opposed to the centralization signaled the death knell for the reorganization plan. The proposition to reorganize the three school districts into one lost on June 28, 1963 by a vote of 725 for and 1119 against.

The Second Effort -- 1967-68

The primary movers of the reorganization were not thwarted by the defeat, only slowed for a while. Gilbert Brady, district principal in Batesville, persevered knowing that he had the support of the State Education Department and the District Superintendent, John Cheeny.

> I think you should know that I had the complete backing of John Cheeny. John had been a very good supporter all the way through. John and I worked together for years and he was a great supporter, great supporter.

Early in 1967 a merger committee was formed and then divided into several sub-committees. The selection of the merger committee was a source of trouble for the reorganization effort. Speaking of the reorganization effort, Jonathan "Jon" Brown, "... but what really made people mad, [was] they hand-picked their committee ..."

William Mason, a Batesville resident who was very much against the merger, voices the same sentiment in a slightly different way. Mr. Mason believes there were several issues, but certainly one of them was the merger committee. To paraphrase Mr. Mason words, the basic problem with the committee membership was that it appeared to many people, particularly in Batesville, that the people on the committee were the social acquaintances of the district principal. Mr. Mason believes that once this impression became wide-spread, many people took a negative attitude toward the reorganization. "I think an awful lot [of people] that wasn't in that social group took the negative way.

Even though "Gil" Brady does not say so directly, one does get the feeling that the committee was "stacked." Brady states that "We had some good people on the committee. We picked the leaders of each community to be on it." Brady, in selecting the committee members for recommendation to the Board of Education, had the advantage of having gone through a merger failure just four years previously. The communities had not changed substantially in that period of time and many of the people who had taken sides in the previous merger attempt would still be around. The committee selected to head the study for the 1968 merger included more pro and neutral persons than ones who were against the 1963 merger.

The report of the merger committee was made public the week before Christmas in 1967. With several sub-committees reporting findings that recommended a merger between the two districts, the stage was set for a series of public meetings. It was at these public meetings that those persons opposed to the merger had their first opportunity to become public in their opposition. The opposition had been working underground throughout 1967 as the merger committee had been doing its work. Now, however,the forum for opposition was to be supplied by the merger committee and the school districts: public meetings and newspaper coverage.

In January, 1968 the work of convincing the residents of the Meridian Central School and the Batesville Central School began in earnest. A variety of meetings were held in which the primary

purpose was twofold: to disseminate information and to convince people to sign the petitions which had to go to the Commissioner of Education before the merger announcement could be signed by him.[1] The types of meetings included the public information hearings which were a "formal" type of public meeting, speeches given before service and fraternal organizations, and "kaffee klatches" in individual homes.

With the onset of this process, newspapers began to pick-up indications of dissent. The first of these was the resignation of three Board of Education members--one from his position as president on the Batesville Board of Education and one from each of the Boards. At the time of the resignations (January 16, 1968), none of the men indicated their resignations had anything to do with the merger. One, the man resigning from the

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[1]In New York State, the Commissioner of Education may authorize or "lay-out" combinations of districts for reorganization. It has been the practice, however, to go though a series of steps before including any district in a reorganization order. The steps include:

1. The completion of a study which indicates that the reorganization proposal is desirable. Such a study covers the following areas:
   a) current and projected enrollments;
   b) current and projected professional staffing plans;
   c) current and projected housing plans;
   d) a plan for educational programs and curricula in the proposed district;
   e) a proposed transportation plan
2. Informing the people in the district of the potential reorganization.
3. Filing petitions that indicate that the majority of the voters in the districts affected support of the proposal for reorganization.

When all of these steps have been completed, the Commissioner calls for a special meeting at which time the voters in the districts vote on the reorganization proposal.

Batesville Board, went so far as to state: "I am not resigning to either help or hinder the merger."

The person making this statement--Robert Nicholson--was very opposed to the reorganization and began making public statements challenging the figures presented by school officials as evidence of reasons why the districts should merge as soon as he had the opportunity. His first real opportunity came with the distribution of the merger brochure and the house-to-house drive to get signatures on the petition. He contacted The Radisson Reporter and was interviewed on his opposition. He gave several reasons for his opposition including disagreement with the financial picture presented by school officials and the merger committee as well as concern about the expenditure of school district monies to support the reorganization effort.

It was clear that Nicholson had been working quite some time on preparing to dissent in the reorganization plan. He had a letter from the State Comptroller which obviously was in reply to an inquiry from Nicholson about the use of school monies to support the merger campaign. He showed this letter to the reporter for The Radisson Reporter just before February 6, 1968 the date on which his interview was published.[2] For him to have

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[2]The Controller's opinion, as expressed in the letter to Nicholson and printed in The Radisson Reporter was that "school district moneys may not be used to support a publicity campaign to promote the proposed merger of two school districts." The Comptroller cited Education Law sections 1709, 1805, and 1 in his reply.

that reply in hand meant that Nicholson had been at work behind the scenes for some time.

In addition to working against the reorganization in overt ways, Nicholson and his supporters had other ways in which they worked against the merger. Nicholson was a postal worker and had several colleagues who sided with him on his opposition to the merger. One of the other persons working in the post office in the late 1960's was the wife of the district principal, "Gil" Brady. Mrs. Brady had been a music teacher, but had resigned that position when her children were young so that she could be home. When the children were old enough she returned to work, this time at the Batesville post office.

The Batesville core of opposition with Nicholson as its leader took advantage of having nearly daily contact with Mrs. Brady. According to Mr. Brady, hardly an opportunity went by that they did not make remarks to her abut the reorganization effort. Most of these remarks were negative, personal comments about Mr. Brady and his role in the merger, none of which were ever said to him, presumably because his opponents did not have the courage to confront him directly.

The second member who resigned was George Fredericksen of the Meridian Board of Education. He resigned saying only that he wished to retire from public life. He apparently was true to his word as he was not mentioned in any articles regarding the merger nor was his name mentioned by any who recalled the events of the reorganization.

The third Board member who resigned not from the Board, but from his position as president of the Batesville Board of Education stated he was resigning "Due to business and personal reasons plus the added number of extra meetings involved with the suggested merger." Mr. Reigle remained on the School Board until a later political crisis caused him to tender his resignation.

Mr. Reigle's position on the merger is not exactly clear. Mr. Bradly recalls that Reigle was against the merger, but very fair and open in his opposition to it. His main concern was that they--i.e., Batesville residents--were going to lose too much.

> He was against it, but he was very fair about it. He'd say, "Well, I think we're going to lose a lot." We did. We lost a lot. That is all high school activities are in Meridian. We used to have our own plays here. And people didn't have to go to Meridian to take their kids and so forth. So we did lose a lot.

Reigle, on the other hand, remembers himself as being in support of the merger although somewhat ambivalent about it.

> It was a lot of people and I was one of them that just assumed that if the two schools merged, it was gonna be a benefit. But we weren't too sure of that and I know with the way it's worked out [there's a question] if it really has been a very big benefit. Probably there have been some benefits from it, but I know there have been a lot of people who have been disappointed.

While Board of Education members were busy resigning, the school officials and members of the merger committees were busy holding public meetings, meeting with various organizations, and speaking to small groups of people whenever they were invited to do so. The reaction to these meetings was mixed. There was some

support being generated, but publicly there were greater outcries against the merger than shouts for it. The opposition to the merger focused on two fronts: the mechanics of promoting the merger and the substance on the merger itself.

The merger committee and the Boards of Education had, of course, prepared a brochure that presented the merger in the best light. All efforts by School Boards to "sell" reorganization emphasize the potential for decreased taxes or, at least, taxes that do not rise as much as they would without reorganization, and improved educational opportunities for students. The School Boards and merger committee were no different in this reorganization effort.

The issues that surfaced in opposition to the merger itself were concerned with the finances of the district to be formed, the quality of the educational program, and the proposed building program which was part of the long-range reorganization plan.

One of the primary opponents who kept his focus on the substance of the merger was a longtime Batesville resident. This man was concerned that the costs had not been fully explained regarding the building of a new school and that the School Boards were presenting misleading facts. He was also concerned that the promises of a tax decrease were very misleading, and claimed in a letter to The Batesville Gazette that, "A tax decrease can't be guaranteed." He felt that the projected curriculum for the proposed high school was going to be too expansive and too expensive.

This critic was not alone in his opposition to the merger. His letters to the Editor of The Batesville Gazette were often joined by others. One person who frequently wrote was Jon Brown, present president of the Eatonton Board of Education. He was openly skeptical about the promises being made: "Don't be white-washed by the pretty picture they are painting, for after the first storm, the white-wash washes off."

As the opposition to the substance of the merger came on one front, on a second front came opposition to the tactics that were being used to try and convince people of the merits of the merger. Several persons who remained anonymous either because they refused to be identified when they were interviewed by newspaper reporters or because they signed letters to the Editor "A Concerned Citizen" expressed negative feelings about the modus operandi of presenting the merger proposal. As reported in The Radisson Reporter of February 1, 1968, one person saw the merger as not being decided on its merit, but on personalities:

> I'm afraid it's [the merger question] going to descend to the level of personalities. This has happened in many places. I hate to see it happen to the kids of Batesville and Meridian, but I'll bet that the merger won't be considered on its merit.

The sentiments of this person were reported by another community resident in a letter to the Editor of The Batesville Gazette on January 15, 1968:

> Batesville has become like an armed camp... The merger has too much political involvement. ...This usually indicates that individuals are seeking self-gratification--

> not necessarily working for the best interest of the public.

In addition to the concerns expressed about the focus on personalities and the need for certain persons to meet their needs for self-importance, there were other concerns. As reported in both The Radisson Reporter and The Batesville Gazette several persons complained about their children being told in Sunday School to go home and tell their parents to vote for the merger. This tactic was a real source of irritation.

> I think the merger would probably save us money. I won't argue that, but I'll be darned if I'll have my children come home from Sunday school and tell me how to vote. I was really burned up the other Sunday when a Sunday school teacher gave my children a 'pitch' on the importance of voting in favor of the merger--instead of giving my children religious instruction.

In spite of the opposition to the centralization that had surfaced, the drive to get signatures on the petitions continued. Donald Schaffer, Meridian high school principal who was also chairman of the merger committee, announced on March 7, 1968, "We are doing very well now on the petitions."[3] The committee was hopeful of obtaining signatures of 60 percent of the residents of the two school districts even though only 50 percent was required by law.

Within a week the desired number of signatures had been obtained and the petitions were delivered to the Commissioner of Education the week of March 14, 1968. Taking the petitions to

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[3]The Radisson Reporter, March 8, 1968.

Albany were the district principals from each school district, the chairman of the merger committee, and the District Superintendent.

What was happening in Albany presents an interesting parallel to what was happening in the two schools districts. In anticipation that the school districts would get enough signatures on the petitions, the Chief of the Bureau of School District Organization had prepared an internal State Eduction Department memo on January 31, 1968 recommending to the Commissioner of Education that he issue an order announcing a "State Plan for Central School District No. 4 of the Towns of Rogers, Meridian, Marathon, Eaton County (Batesville) and Central School District No. 1 of the towns of Meridian, Thomasville, Jones, Eaton County (Meridian)."

The memo further recommended that "the announcement be issued as soon as possible so that this proposition [the merger proposition] may be brought to a referendum with sufficient time for the new district to engage in budget planning for negotiation." Anticipation of a successful referendum had the Bureau Chief looking well into the future planning for contract negotiations with the new school district's labor organizations.

The Bureau Chief apparently was either not aware of what was happening in the district or had chosen to underestimate the strength of the opposition. His memo continued by saying that no difficulties were expected with the reorganization.

Responding to the internal memo, Ewald Nyquist, Acting Commissioner, signed the announcement for the reorganization plan on March 4, 1968 three days before the chairman of the merger committee announced that the signing of the petitions was going well and nearly two weeks before the petitions were delivered to Albany.

While the people in Baton County were believing that they had a choice in the decision to vote on reorganization, the State Education Department officials were planning for the reorganization vote. Ironically, a letter to the editor of The Batesville Gazette had suggested that perhaps there was more influence from the State Education Department than school districts officials and personnel in the State Education Department wanted the residents of Eatonton to be aware of. The "concerned citizen" who wrote "There seems to be feeling by some that the 'big boys' from Albany are trampling over the 'little people' of Batesville and that [the SED officials think that people in the school districts] are nothing but ignorant rural people." What this writer suspected was something that the entire community should have known: the State was moving ahead on the reorganization and State Education Department officials considered the centralization to be fait accompli.

The school district officials had to know that the State Education Department was moving ahead as the internal memorandum has indicated. Although it is possible that the school district residents never knew of the timing of what was happening in the

district vis' a vis what was happening in the State Education Department, the discrepancy between what the school officials were telling the community and what they knew was going on at the State level says quite a bit about the relationship between the administration, the School Board, and the community.

It appears that in these early pre-referendum stages that the local school administration was so anxious to obtain a positive vote on the reorganization referendum that integrity with the Board of Education was being sacrificed. Chief school officers typically serve as the funnel for information coming to and going from the school district. This is a source of power for the person in this position. That power can be abused by the manipulation of information.

While it is not clear in this situation why the discrepancy in both the timing of various stages of the merger process and the perceptions of what was happening existed, it is clear that community residents and, perhaps, members of the Boards of Education were not fully apprised of actions taken by State Education Department officials.

From the Ballot Box to the Courtroom

In March 1968 after the special meeting to vote on reorganization was announced by the Commissioner, the campaign for reorganization intensified. It became "intense and bitter" according to a memo written by the district principal. The

conflict intensified up to and beyond the vote itself with "neither side wanting to give an inch."

The vote on the referendum to merge Batesville and Meridian Central Schools was held on May 1, 1968. Apparently during the actual voting process there were some attempts to challenge some of the voters or voting procedures. According to William Mason, Batesville resident, the challenges were not formalized because of one of the members of the Board of Canvass. It seems that one of the men on the Board was a minister who took the challenges as a personal affront to his integrity. His reaction made people back away from the challenge process. However, when the final vote was announced, the opponents of the merger were not deterred by anyone's reaction. They immediately announced a challenge to the entire vote.

> Now, after the decision was made that this vote stood, then ... it developed such a, oh what will we say, spirit of doing something. Right away they called a meeting. Well then, everybody that was against the vote had a meeting and in that meeting the decision was made to take it [the outcome of the vote] to court.

Brady, Batesville district principal at the time, believes that the challenge would have come even if the vote had not been close. "Yeah, they would have protested the vote. Even if it had not been close they would have found some lawyer to find some irregularity."

The vote was very close (894 for; 890 against; 15 void or blank) and this provided the basis for the challenge. The challenge was made in the form of a petition to the Commissioner of Education asking him to recount the vote because of irregularities in the procedures. The ballots were impounded by the Commissioner and all pertinent information and voting materials were forwarded to the legal division of the State Education Department. The Commissioner received the petition from James Mason and John P. McIntyre, petitioners, on May 17, 1968.

On August 18, 1968, the Commissioner handed down his ruling. The recount of the vote showed 884 for the merger, 872 against the merger, and 43 votes to be either void or blank. The void or blank votes were discounted because they failed in the following ways to meet the standards for voting.

6 no	Had the word "no" written in.
1 yes, 2 no	Contained marks other than a check or X.
1 no	Had three marks instead of one.
2 yes, 5 no	Had marks outside the boxes.
4 no	Contained extraneous marks.
1 yes, 1 no	Ballots were torn.
6 yes, 10 no	Contained erasures.
2 yes, 2 no	Had numbers written on them.

Thirty-one "no" votes were declared void or blank because of irregularities while only 12 "yes" votes were so declared. The difference in the number of "yes" and "no" votes disqualified

reflects the intensity of the feelings of the reorganization opponents. According to the district principal, some of the words written on the ballots were quite negative, some of the ballots were torn in anger, and some of the ballots had the extra marks on them because the voter was trying to be very emphatic in casting the negative ballot.

Although the void votes listed above changed the numbers voting for the merger and against it, the outcome did not change. However, because the difference between negative and positive votes was less than the number of void ballots, many people did not accept either accounting of the ballots cast. Of 1979 votes cast, 884 were declared valid "yes" votes and 872 were declared valid "no" votes; 43 were void. If all the void votes has been declared valid and had been added to their respective categories, the final vote would have been 896 for the reorganization and 903 against. The reorganization referendum would have failed and the outcome would have been reversed. The knowledge of this only served to make the opponents of the reorganization more resolved to continue their challenge.

In examining the other irregularities cited in the petition, the Commissioner found "substantial compliance" with 1803-a of Education Law. Although in his decision the Commissioner noted that the petitioners were challenging three additional ballots because the ballots were taken out of the voting place to accommodate handicapped persons, he found that the challenges were improper because they were not made at the time the ballots

was cast. It was the Commissioner's position that to be a proper challenge, the challenge had to come at the time the ballot was being cast.

Those persons in the community who were against the merger were not about to accept the Commissioner's ruling. However, to go further with their challenge, they had to prove that the Commissioner's decision was "arbitrary and capricious."[4]

The attorney representing the petitioners prepared the Article 78 proceeding[5] on several points:

1. The ballots declared void by the Commissioner should have originally been placed in a sealed envelope--they were not, they were loose in the ballot box.
2. Previous court rulings had found that challenges do not have to be made at the time the ballot is cast.
3. The Commissioner contended that the irregularities did not affect the outcome of the vote.

The points were prepared in a brief and heard before the State Supreme Court in a special term of the Supreme Court in Albany.

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[4]Whenever a citizen wishes to challenge something relating to education in New York Sate that person has a choice of going either through the court system or appealing to the Commissioner. If the decision is made to go through the court system, an appeal to the Commissioner is not possible. If the decision is made to appeal to the Commissioner in the first instance, the decision of the Commissioner is not reviewable by the courts unless it can first be shown that the Commissioner was "arbitrary and capricious" in his decision.

[5]A legal process under which the courts will review the Commissioner's decision to determine if it was "arbitrary and capricious."

The Court found that the Commissioner did not act in an arbitrary manner; however, he was concerned about the Commissioner's position that the failure to challenge the votes at the time of the election made the voters unchallengeable in the future.

> We know of no statutory provision of judicial decision tending to support the Commissioner's contention that failure to challenge any unqualified voter in some way rendered the conduct of the election invulnerable to attack. We do not find persuasive the fact that there is not the slightest suggestion in any record that any of the 26 or, indeed, any of the others were not voters, or not so readily identifiable as to permit petitioners investigation of their status. Showing of the existence of opportunities to cast illegal or improper votes is not enough to invalidate an election; there must be a showing that the illegal votes were actually cast. Otherwise, the presumption of regularity stands unrebutted.

The final words of the ruling, "Accordingly, petitioners may submit judgment for the relief prayed for," gave permission to ask the courts to have the Commissioner's ruling reversed, the election invalidated and made void. The submission of the judgment and the finding that the election should be overturned gave the Commissioner the right to appeal the Supreme Court.[6]

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[6]Although it is not stated in any record which this researcher has been privy to, the State Education Department apparently made the decision to go to court on the issue of the election itself rather than on the procedural issue of the court's finding with regard to the Commissioner's original decision. The Court had taken an unusual step by ruling on the Commissioner's opinion rather than simply ruling on whether it had found him to be "capricious and arbitrary" in his opinion.

The Commissioner's office announced that the State Education Department would appeal the Supreme Court decision in early January, 1969. It was, however, not until late March that the appeal was actually filed. The decision of the Appellate Division was handed down on July 1, 1969.

In part, the decision of the Appellate Division reads:

> Petitioners have failed to prove that the unlawful acts complained or would have affected the result of the election. The record discloses the presence of various irregularities which were untainted by fraud. Conceivably, these irregularities could have affected the outcome, but in our opinion the probabilities repel this conclusion. Under such circumstances, the election will not be overturned.
>
> The determination of the acting commissioner that the results of the election as recounted by him approved the proposition and that the petition be dismissed, should be sustained.
>
> Judgment and order reversed, on the law and the facts, and petition dismissed, without costs.

The score stood two to one with the anti-merger group having the "one." But, the contest was not over yet. There was still the opportunity to continue the appeal process.

While the protagonists in the battle were deciding whether or not to continue the fight, administrators and School Board members were trying to keep cool. No one had any idea whether the district which they thought had been created on May 1, 1968 would, in the final analysis, exist. In the meanwhile, school was in session and approximately 1700 students were coming everyday to be educated. During the first two and one-half years

after the original merger vote nothing in the two districts changed very much. There was one Board of Education, one district principal, and one set of athletic teams; everything else was exactly as it had been before the merger vote. There were two high schools, two sets of financial records, two marching bands, really two of everything that under normal merger conditions would have become one. The conditions were less than ideal.

> It has been neighbor against neighbor and former friend against former friend ever since the voting irregularity charges were first filed. Several Board members, and one administrator resigned; one Board president stepped down and later resigned his post entirely. Some charged (but never substantiated) that the Board held secret sessions.

The conflict was not limited to the community and the Board of Education. Teachers were on both sides of the fence and this was reflected in the educational setting. Teachers felt so strongly about the merger issue that in some cases teachers who had been good friends would not even speak to one another when it became clear that they were on opposite sides of the fence.

The havoc that was being created because of the state of limbo that the school district found itself in and because of the bitter feelings of the people on both sides of the issue did not deter the people who were fighting the merger. At least it was not enough of a deterrent for them to decide not to appeal after the Appellate Division had overruled the Supreme Court.

A meeting was called by John P. McIntyre and James Mason for July 18, 1969 in the Batesville American Legion Hall for anyone interested in continuing the legal challenge and contributing to it. Their call for moral and financial support was adequately answered. The case went to the Court of Appeals in late 1969 with the original petitioners, James Mason and John P. McIntyre, as appellants.

The hearing on his last appeal was set for January 8, 1970 and the decision was handed down on January 22, 1970. The Court of Appeals affirmed the Appellate Division on the basis of that Division's written opinion; the justices of the Court of Appeals concurred with those of the Appellate Division. The legal avenues open to the challengers of the merger were finally closed, but the issues were far from dead and there was resolve to fight the reorganization in other ways.

The Building Project

While the challenges to the merger were being fought by the State Education Department many of the promises of the reorganization campaign were on hold. One of these was the building project.

A primary argument presented in favor of the merger was the need for each of the two school districts to build because of increasing enrollments. With the merger, it was postulated, the new district would build a new junior-senior high school and the two original buildings would remain the elementary buildings.

Cost savings because of building incentive aid and increased opportunities for students because of new and expanded facilities were two of the benefits to be derived from the merger and subsequent building program.

With the new district's legal existence in question, very little was done with plans for a new building except to retain the services of an architectural firm. The final decision of the Court of Appeals was handed down in January, 1970. While reports were made periodically throughout the spring of 1970 about visits of the architect to the school district or visits to new schools that had been built in other districts since reorganization, no meetings specifically on the building plans and site were held until January, 1971.

At the Board of Education meeting in September and October, 1970 there had been heated discussion on the building plans and the question of where to locate the new building. The architect had examined fifteen sites, but none of these were advisable because of the potential problem of insufficient water. Community residents came to the Board to express their dissatisfaction with the process of site selection as well as the sites themselves.

On January 14, 1971 the Board of Education met to decide on which property the building should be located. "A sharply divided" Board defeated several motions on specific sites. A motion finally passed to seek an option to purchase a piece of property in Meridian. The vote was 4-3 with most of the "yes"

voters explaining that they were not approving the site mentioned, but were just trying to get moving on the building project.

More than nine months later the Board of Education still had not selected a site and the public still had not had an opportunity to vote on either the purchase of property or the building of a new school. The arguments that had come before the Board of Education in September and October of 1970 were heard again in the same months of 1971 since the Board had not addressed the building issue in any substantive way during that period. There were still very strong feelings about the school site and the process of the selection. In addition, there was community dissatisfaction with the Board of Education's failure to get anything done on the construction plans.

> We've certainly got to make some progress in this area. We owe it to the people and the students to give voters a chance to vote on a new building. We have done nothing.

The Board of Education decided that it would have a special meeting in November for the single purpose of discussing the building project. In comparison to the Board of Education meetings earlier in the year, the special meeting turned out to be quite anti-climatic. Only 50 persons turned out for the meeting and most of those had some direct connection with the school district. Instead of the challenging comments directed to the Board of Education in the previous meetings, the audience had to be prodded into commenting by State Education Department

officials who were there to speak on the issues of time and state aid.

The informational meeting in November 1971 did not prove to be a catalyst for any further action on the part of the Board of Education. At the end of January, 1972, Jack Brainard, District Principal of the school district, stated, "At the end of 1971, after examining 15 sites, we are no further ahead than we were at the end of 1970." The surface issue seemed to continue to be the question of how to provide water and sewer services to the school. Several proposals had come forth including piping water up from Eaton Lake, tying in with the village sewer system in Meridian, and providing a sewer system just for the new high school building. None of these options, among others were one on which the Board could reach consensus or even get a simple majority.

In March, 1972 a new possibility arose--the possibility of obtaining land at Shepard State Prison. The land was considered to be "surplus" meaning that the prison did not need it for the current program and that there was no need anticipated in the future. The architects thought that the land at Shepard would be suitable although somewhat smaller than optimal. Certainly the acquisition of the parcel from Shepard would solve the problem of water and sewer services since the school could hook right into existing plants. For the first time in several months, the Board agreed on a positive action. The members voted to pursue the possibility of obtaining the land at Shepard State Prison.

By mid-April the New York State Legislature had passed a bill authorizing the State to sell 40 acres of surplus land at the Shepard State Prison to the school district. Brainard, district principal, presented a proposal to the Board of Education asking it to move forward on presenting a referendum to the voters on the purchase of the land and the construction of a new building. The Board failed to act positively on this proposal and in mid-June was only at the point of having the land assessed.

Other problems in the school district were so debilitating to the school district that the Board of Education failed to take any further action on the building project for several more months. The resignation of the district principal which was forced by the teachers' association, the resignation of the majority of the Board, and the community's effort to have the State "de-merge" the school district all demanded such attention that the building project took on a very low priority.

In the fall, after a new district principal had been hired and new Board of Education members had been seated, the Board of Education got back to the building project. It was decided that the Board would further explore the possibility of remodeling the existing buildings, a consideration that had previously been rejected. Also taken under consideration was an offer from a former Board of Education member to make available 39 acres of land from his property.

Progress again seemed at a standstill. In January, 1973, Cranston, the new district principal, presented a letter from the State Education Department in which the Department recommended that the district build a new high school. The recommendation came as part of a report on the current condition of the buildings in the school district. The report cited several areas in which the existing buildings failed to meet standards set by the State. Cranston reported that a full report based on an assessment by school district personnel on the need for a new building would be made at the February Board of Education meeting.

In February, 1973 an "informal" meeting--i.e., one in which the Board of Education could not take official action--was held with officials of the State Education Department, the architectural firm, and the administration. The result of that meeting was that the school district should build a new high school and that the site of the construction should be the first parcel considered by the district which happened to be contiguous to property already owned by the district. The decision was formalized at the March 12 regular business meeting of the Board of Education. One month later at the April meeting, the Board set the referendum date for June 26, 1973.

Five years and two months after the merger vote, the community was finally getting an opportunity to vote on the issue of where to build the new building. It is important to keep in mind that the vote was not on whether there should be a new

building, but where the building would be built if new construction were approved by a future referendum.

The referendum passed by a vote of 412 to 389. No tax increase was involved with the purchase of this land. The cost, not to exceed $13,000, was to come from the school district's fund balance.

Finally in November, 1973 the Board of Education decided to put a bond issue referendum before the voters on December 17, 1973. If approved, the purchase of the bonds would fund the local district's part of the cost of constructing a new high school building and making needed renovations to the two existing buildings. The total cost of the new construction was projected at $3.5 million and the renovation at $1.5 million. State aid of approximately 95% would be available on everything except a swimming pool which the Board of Education decided to add at the last minute.

The last minute decision, based on the assumption that the community would not object to the additional cost because the overall cost to taxpayers would be very low, proved to be a poor one. The voters said "no" to the building plan by a vote of 656 to 315. After five and one-half years they had finally been given their chance and they said "too late." Not enough involvement, too much in-fighting, and the addition of a "frill"--the swimming pool--were just some of the reasons for the defeat. In addition, there seems to have been a still embittered anti-merger faction who was active in the negative vote. The school

district was back to the beginning with yet another district principal--the school district's fourth chief school officer--and faced with the need to try and move forward on what now had become a critical situation. Time was running out for the high level of state aid on which the financial rationale for the new building had been built and the present buildings were increasingly in need of extensive renovations.

The Attempt to "De-merge" the School District

While the challenges to the re-organization of the school district and the attempt to move forward on a building project were certainly the prime surface issues in the new district, other forces were at work which kept the new district on very unstable ground for many years. One of these forces was the continuing effort of the anti-merger group to somehow get rid of the new district and go back to the original organization before the merger.

The forces against the continuation of the school district as the Eatonton Central School District worked against all changes in the district which solidified the merger and worked against the passage of all budgets. The efforts of these people finally resulted in an attempt to have the school "de-merged."[7]

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[7]The word "de-merge" is placed within quotation marks because all letters, reports, and other documentation on the effort, including a letter from the Commissioner use the word in this manner.

Under the leadership of the Town of Meridian Supervisor, more than 1600 signatures were collected on a petition which were requested that the Commissioner of Education "de-merge" the school district. The petitions were originally presented to the Board of Education at its December 16, 1971 meeting. When the petition was presented those presenting it stated that there was wide spread dissatisfaction with the educational program in the district as well as dissatisfaction with other results of the merger. They also stated that there was too much friction in the district and that a return to the original two districts was the best way to deal with the friction. Underlying most of the comments was dissatisfaction with the present administration and some members of the Board of Education.

Rumors regarding the circulation of the petition to "de-merge' the school district had existed for months. In an effort to combat the effect of the "de-merger" petition the Student Council started a counter-petition movement. The Student Council was limited somewhat by not knowing that the "de-merger" petition was going to be presented until just a few days prior to the meeting. In spite of having to collect signature during free time, the Student Council was reasonably prepared and on the same evening that the "de-merger" proponents presented their petition, the Student Council presented its petition.

The Student Council petition, which has been circulated only in the high school, had 316 signatures. Most of the signatures were those of high school students, but many were signatures of

faculty and staff. The Student Council petition stated that the students and staff of the high school fully-supported the merger and believed that it would be more beneficial for the community to work toward a solution to the school's problems "rather than to work against the entire situation."

At the Board of Education meeting, everyone agreed that there were no provisions under existing regulations of the Commissioner to "de-merge" a school district. However, two Board of Education members were sympathetic to the intent of the petition and put a motion before the Board of Education which directed that the petition be forwarded to the State Education Department's legal division for an opinion. The motion passed and Brainard, District Principal, was formally directed to send the petition to Albany. Brainard used the office of the District Superintendent as the office of transmittal. The petition was forwarded with a letter of transmittal from the District Superintendent to the State Education Department on January 26, 1971.

Although it had been anticipated that the Commissioner would take several weeks, perhaps even months, to respond to the issue addressed by the petition, he responded within two weeks of having received the materials from the District Superintendent. The Commissioner's response was quite strong.

> You [the District Superintendent] request my statement as to whether or not the Education Law provides a procedure for, or authorizes in any way, a "de-merger" of a central school district by dividing the same into its former components. This is to advise you

> emphatically that there is no existing procedure which would make this possible.[8]

The Commissioner continued his letter by stating that the policy of the Board of Regents and the action of the Legislature had, for the past 50 years, encouraged the formation of larger districts in the interest of improved financial considerations and educational opportunities.

Upon receipt of this letter from the Commissioner, Brainard made a plea for the two warring factions in the school district to "bury the hatchet" and channel their energies into more positive activities.

Administrative and Board Member Turnover

Brainard's plea to "bury the hatchet" apparently fell on deaf ears for what followed during the next five months was an all-out effort to get him to either resign or be removed from his position. Brainard was in his second year as district principal, but the strong positions he felt he had had to take upon coming to the district had split not only the community, but had also turned the teachers against him. Brainard had taken his charge from the Board of Education to move the district forward away from the traditions and practices of the former districts toward the promises of centralization. He was to bring the two high school programs together, transfer teachers where necessary, and plan for a new building program. Brainard had acted in ways

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[8]Letter from Ewald B. Nyquist, Commissioner of Education to the BOCES superintendent, February 3, 1972.

which reflected his interpretation of the Board of Education's mandate to him. In doing so he had made many enemies and so by the middle of May, 1972, Brainard had submitted his resignation. He was the second of three chief school officers the district would have before it had been in existence five years. The next chief school officer did not even remain for a full year, citing opportunities he could not turn down as his reason for leaving. The fourth chief school office would remain in the district for longer than any of the previous ones, but his leaving the district would come as a result of a very public battle over tenure for the high school principal which led the Board of Education not to renew his contract.

From the time of reorganization to the present the Board of Education has had factions. The stage was set at the time of the election for the first Board of Education for the reorganized school district. There was an un-written "gentleman's agreement" that an equal representation from the two prior school districts would be on the Board. Therefore, not only did the first Board of Education have people who were interested in looking out for the interests of the old school district they thought they represented, there also were those who were for the reorganization and those who were against it. This pattern of representation from the two former districts, each with parochial interests, established an expectation which affected future Boards of Education. Citizens voted for persons whom they thought would best represent their individual interests. In

return, the Board members were responsive to specific constituencies rather than the school district residents as a total community.

During the 17 year history of the district there have been 42 different members of the Board and two persons have either chosen not to run or have resigned during a term and then run sometime in the future. The average length of time a person has remained on the Board has been 2.6 years. This figure is an indicator of the level of turnover particularly considering four people have served seven, eight, or nine years and the term of office until 1974-75 was five years. Fifteen people resigned during their term of office and 12 chose not to run for re-election.

The Financial Picture

The budget for the 1985-86 school year was not approved by the voters until July 24, 1985, the date of the third vote on the budget. The original budget had only been defeated by one vote the first time it went before the voters. It failed by nearly 60 votes the second time it was presented. The final budget that was approved had a tax levy of $1,679,189.00 which represented a 5.9% increase over the previous year.

To reach a tax levy at this level, the Board of Education reduced the original budget by $40,950.00 and applied $17,000.00 of an unrestricted fund balance against it. The final tax rate was $26.52 per $1000 of assessed evaluation. Equalization rates

in the five towns which comprise the school district vary the rate from town to town. The table below gives the assessed value and tax rate for 1985-86 for each town.

TABLE 2

School District Tax Information

Town	Assessed Value	Tax Rate/$1000
Meridian	$21,545,903	26.9376
Rogers	17,621,589	23.6676
Jones	13,220,841	26.9415
Thomasville	11,720,976	27.2584
Hector	197,800	30.3069

The full value property wealth per pupil is $57,159.20.

The total budget expenditures are $4295.23 per pupil.

Enrollment Patterns and Projections

Year	Special Education*	K-4	5-8	9-12	K-12	Grand Total
1980-81						1188*
1981-82	22	384	390	368	1142	1164
1982-83	24	361	407	360	1128	1152
1983-84	30	382	380	362	1124	1154
1984-85	31	395	356	360	1111	1145
1985-86	39	404	320	379	1103	1142
1986-87	32	408	293	397	1098	1130
1987-88	32	404	309	359	1072	1104
1988-89	32	406	309	343	1058	1090
1989-90	32	392	337	302	1021	1063

The original enrollment projects done at the time of reorganization estimated a district population of 2107 by the

year 1977-78. Of these number 934 students were projected for grades 7-12 and 1173 for grades K-6. The actual enrollment for 1977-78 was 1483; the estimate was off 624 students or by 30%.

Some of the assumptions made at the time of reorganization on which the enrollment projects were based are interesting. The assumptions included the following:

1. Improved program would attract more post-graduate students and reduce the drop-out rate.
2. Increased in special education students would mean an in-district program for them.
3. Increased population would come from neighboring communities as people moved to the "country"--growth of a local college would help in this respect.
4. Construction of four lane limited-access highway to replace an existing two-lane route would make the area more accessible from Radisson.

The only assumption which has proven to be true is the assumption that the increased in the number of special education students would require on in-district program.

In the period of time from 1980-81 until 1985-86, the school district budget has risen approximately 30 percent as has the State aid which the district receives. The State aid represents approximately 57 percent of the total budget revenues; the balance of the revenues is made up from taxes and items such as interest earned on investments, planned balances, and revenue received from the sale of unneeded or unused materials, supplies,

and equipment. While the budget has risen 30 percent, the enrollment had dropped four percent and is expected to drop another four percent in the next four years.

THE EDUCATIONAL SETTING

The Educational Program: An Overview

Seventeen years after reorganization the school district has 600 fewer students and the same two school buildings it inherited from the former districts. The decline in enrollment is typical of districts in the central part of New York State. However, like others near it, the Eatonton District finds that projections show the decline leveling off.

The buildings have been modernized, but each remains essentially as it was in 1968. These buildings are similar to hundreds of other school buildings built in New York during the Depression years and before the Second World War.

The 1200 students are served by a faculty of approximately 80 teachers, and a service staff of nearly 60. In addition to the superintendent there are two building administrators--one who has the responsibility for the K-8 building; the other the 9-12 building--and a business manager. Assisting the business manager with the non-instructional functions of the district are the transportation director, a director of buildings and grounds, and a director of cafeteria services.

The school district offers a comprehensive program providing educational opportunities for the academically gifted as well as

those in need of remediation and special support services. There is a full complement of Regents' courses in the academic areas as well as several offerings in the areas of home economics, industrial arts, art, and music. High school students may participate in the vocational educational programs offered by the regional Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES). Children with handicapping conditions are also educated in programs sponsored by the BOCES. But, unlike the vocational education student, the majority of the students who have been identified by the Committee of the Handicapped do not have to travel to the BOCES campus. They are educated either in their own school district or in the neighboring district to the south.

Although the district tries to provide a comprehensive program and meet the mandates of the law as prescribed either in specific state or federal legislation or the regulations of the Commissioner on the Board of Regents, there are difficulties which translate into problems for students. The relatively small number of high school students usually means that the advanced classes or classes at the opposite end of the spectrum have such low demand that only one section of each class can be offered. These "singletons" frequently appear on the master schedule at the same time forcing students to make choices between two or more subjects they might want to take. For example, advanced placement English is offered at the same time as chemistry lab so a student is forced to choose between an advanced science and the AP English which has the potential of carrying college credit.

Even in situations where more than one section offered, as in the case of English 12 which all students must take if they are not in AP English, choices are forced. A student who takes English 12 seventh period cannot take either math 12 or American government. If the student chooses math 12 or American government, he/she forced to take English 12 either third or fourth period which obviates the opportunity to take chemistry and/or music theory and/or French 3 or economics all of which could be senior classes.

The vocational educational student has similar problems. Students attend the classes at BOCES for one-half day five days a week. However, for students at Eatonton, the travel time is such that they have only three periods a day in the home school. Each must take English every year as well as physical education. Although physical education does not meet daily, English does. This means at best that the student who goes to BOCES has just two periods in which to meet requirements. Obviously, the BOCES student is constrained by what is offered during the particular three periods he is in the home school.

Surveys distributed to the junior and senior class students in the fall of 1985 reveal that the students are affected by the scheduling problems. Academically-talented students frequently complained of not being able to fit everything into their schedules while BOCES students felt the pressures of being in the home school for such a limited period of time each day. Advanced students also complained of limited opportunity to participate in

the co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. Only those students who were in the home school for the full day and were taking a schedule of classes that represented the standard or typical progression through school--e.g., English 10 in the tenth grade--experienced no difficulty.[9]

The direct impact of a small student population on scheduling is obvious. Less obvious is the impact on student relationships and teacher attitudes. Regardless of the philosophical position of the administration, the Board of Education, or the community the students by default if not by design are tracked perpetuating such class distinctions as "jocks," "nerds," "retards," et cetera. While tracking and these attitudes are not unique to small or rural schools, they contradict those advocates of small schools who claim that one of the advantages of smaller schools is that the students are not classified according to stereotypes, but are considered to be and are treated as individuals.

From the teachers' points of view some classes are seen as "plums" while others are "dumping grounds." Teachers are sensitive to getting stuck with too many "dumping grounds" and not having enough "plums." These distinctions, made by both teachers and students, result in class distinctions where little cross-over is permitted. It is unusual to find examples where students are participating in BOCES programs as well as general programs, or advanced programs. Even in situations where a

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[9]Master schedule, BCS High School.

student is intellectually able to take a broad spectrum of courses, student perceptions and teacher attitudes militate against it.

Eatonton Faculty

Overview

The Eatonton Central School District faculty is, for the post part, a long-tenured staff. While some of the more specialized areas at the secondary level have an average teacher experience level of four or five years, experience levels in the high teens and twenties are more typical. The Eatonton teachers work on an eight period day for grades 5 through 12. The school day is about six and one-half hours long. Although the elementary grades 1 through 4 do not have periods, the school day is the same length.

The Middle School - Grades 5 and 6

The day begins for a typical middle school teacher like all other homeroom teachers in the Eatonton School District--greeting 20 to 25 youngsters who have arrived most likely on the school bus. The children begin to arrive at the middle school just after quarter of nine; they are all expected to get into the classroom for a brief homeroom period before the daily schedule begins with the first bell at 9:07.

The homeroom period is a time for the middle school teacher to check absences, take lunch counts, and attend to the other

minutia that usually crowd the beginning of the day. Immediately following the homeroom period, the first periods begins. The fifth grade teachers begin the day with reading and the other language arts while the sixth grade teacher begin their day with a prep period.

The fifth grade year is expected to be a transitional year between the totally self-contained elementary classrooms and the schedule-driven sixth through twelfth grades where each class is taught by a different teacher. "We try to model our fifth grade program to make it a smooth transition..." explains a fifth grade teacher who is particularly concerned about the transition between the middle school and the high school and does not want the transition from the elementary and middle school to fall into the same pattern.

> "I think we're having an academic feud, and a social feud between the high school and the K-8. I don't know if it's because of personalities, or what, we have a real problem with our eighth graders going to high school, ninth grade, and succeeding. They're falling on their faces. Even the good students."

The fifth grade teachers are making an effort to prevent that from happening by talking with the fourth grade teachers. Acknowledging that the problem of articulation does exist, the fifth grade teacher continues,

> But we get to talk with the fourth grade teachers. I taught fourth grade for four years, and I still know the teacher over there. We talk back and forth and you still have problems. We'll argue them out and they don't agree with the way we do things. They

> wanted us to go self-contained this year, and they were real strong about it. We told them not unless you give us a real reason why we should. We have to prepare them for sixth grade a year after this. Sixth grade is departmentalized completely. We can't take them from self-contained and throw them into something they have no knowledge of. We do it part departmentalized; part self-contained.

The articulation problem seems to be an on-going problem for the middle school teachers, but not one that is particularly unique to them. It is not really the type of problem that takes up a lot of discussion except at certain times during the year--after the first report period, at the end of the school year when plans are being made for the next year. Other problems facing the middle school teachers, or perhaps more accurately, issues of concern to them, include the mechanics of conferencing and what to do with or about "difficult" parents.

The faculty room conversation during prep periods for the fifth grade and lunch for some of the sixth and seventh grade teachers provided insight into these concerns. One teacher was having some problem with a parent who, from the teacher's point of view, refused to believe that her child was not being honest in her dealings either with the parent or the teacher and her classmates. The teacher was concerned that the administration would perhaps side with the parent and wondered if other teachers had had any dealings with this particular parent. Several of the teachers were ready and willing to offer suggestions either citing experiences with the same teacher or with situations which seemed similar.

Of equal interest as lunch room conversation was the rumored change in parent/teacher conferences that the administration was going to make. One of the teachers in either seventh or eight grade had heard that the administration was going to change the way they reported student progress to parents. The concern apparently was that they would have to have conferences with parents just like the elementary teachers did. The issue certainly was not going to be resolved right there, but, if the rumor was true, a lot of energy was going to be generated getting the problem settled.

The middle school teacher typically teachers a five or six period day. Each day they are given a prep period during which time the class is in a special subject such as art, music or physical education. Each teacher also has a 40 minute lunch period. The teachers who only teacher five periods a day have a duty period which the other teachers do not have.

Vocational Education Opportunities

Students attending Eatonton Central School have the opportunity to participate in vocational education courses either in their own school or at the area vocational center (BOCES) in Radisson. Industrial arts and mechanical drawing courses are offered at the high school enabling the student who does not want a sequence in vocational education to take some courses in an area of particular interest while getting a major sequence in an

academic area. Students who wish to get a major sequence in one of the vocational education areas usually attend BOCES.

Most of the industrial arts courses offered at Eatonton are one credit courses and are taught on a full-year basis. There are two introductory courses which offer one-half credit: small engines and basic electricity. The other courses are arranged so that a student could get a major sequence, but this is the exception rather than the rule. There are two courses in power mechanics, two courses in wood shop and two courses in metal work. A third course is offered in metal work and construction. Machine shop is offered to students who have demonstrated strong interest and ability in metal work and home construction is offered to those students who wish to go beyond the basics of woodworking offered in the wood shop.

Mechanical drawing is also offered to the students at Eatonton. The first course, which is a prerequisite for the second, teaches the fundamentals of mechanical drawing including the use of equipment and the two-dimensional pictorial representation of three dimensional objects. This is a full-year course and carries one credit. The second course is actually a series of one or more one-half credit courses which are taught on a one semester basis. The student may take one, two, or three of these one-half credit courses depending upon interest. The three one semester courses offered are: architectural drawing, mechanisms, and pictorial representation.

The courses taught at Eatonton may be started in the ninth grade year or later depending upon the student's interest and scheduling flexibility. Students who decide to attend the area vocational center at BOCES generally do not attend until their junior year. Under certain circumstances special permission may be given for a student to begin attending BOCES in either the ninth or tenth grade year. Students attend BOCES for one-half of the day and take required courses at Eatonton the other one-half day. Usually during the time at Eatonton the student takes English, Social Studies, and physical education, all of which are required for four years for graduation.

Special Education Program

Sharon Diamond is the school psychologist and estimates that she spends all but 15 to 20 percent of her time working with children who either have a handicapping condition or are have suspected of having one.

> I am responsible for all of the testing; I am responsible for finding, diagnosing, evaluating children in any area particularly learning disabilities. ...seeing that they have the best possible service in the way of educational facilities.

In addition to the work with children who have a handicapping condition, Ms. Diamond also works with the teachers who have students with educational or other problems which are not severe enough to require special educational services. She also tries to get counseling done with students in grades K-4 who either request it themselves or are referred by a teacher.

Students in the middle school and the high school have a guidance counselor to whom they can go, although several also seek out Ms. Diamond.

The majority of the children in the Eatonton Central School District who have been classified by the Committee of the Handicapped are learning disabled and are placed in a resource room in the school district. Children with handicapping conditions which require more than resource room service are placed in BOCES classes and are housed either in a neighboring district or on the BOCES campus. The following chart details the number of students in each category of handicapping conditions as of December 1, 1984.

Children with Handicapping Conditions

Handicapping Non-School Condition	Related Service	Resource Room	Full-Time Class
Learning Disabled		66	9
Emotionally Disturbed			1
Mentally Retarded		7	22
Hard of Hearing	1		
Speech Impaired	16		
Ortho Impaired	2		
Other Health Imp.	2		
Multiple Handicapped		1	

Ms. Diamond has 132 students for whom annual up-dates must be done on the individual educational plan and for whom triennial re-evaluations must be completed. With such a case load, in addition to the counseling, conferring with teachers and parents,

there are many frustrations. Perhaps most frustrating is the lack of outside help for parents and students.

> We lack referral sources for cases where I would love to prescribe outside therapy -- or parenting courses. There is nothing on a regular basis for just a parenting course-- how do I take care of my kids, what can I expect, what's normal, what isn't, how should I react?"
>
> We have two agencies in the area both of which have a very long waiting list. Families have to wait six to eight weeks. So, it's really difficult for me to get an emergency therapy for crisis intervention. I mean I have called every place trying to get somebody that could be available. I have just met closed doors every place that I have tried. Personnel just doesn't seem to be available.

Speaking generally about the work of the school psychologist, Ms. Diamond says she does not know of any school psychologist or school district who is able to provide the counseling, let alone the real therapy, that students need. There are so many mandates which take up most of the time that a psychologist in a school district that there is little time to respond to the needs of students and teachers which do not come under the auspices of the Committee of the Handicapped.

Ms. Diamond has always felt support from the Superintendent and the Board of Education. She considers herself very fortunate to be full-time in one district; many districts the size of Eatonton share the services of a school psychologist with another district. She recognizes that it is financially not realistic to expect that there would ever be another school psychologist

assigned to the district, but believes there would be more than enough work to keep each one busy and then some.

More than 50 percent of the children who are classified as having a handicapping condition have their needs met in the resource room setting. Most of these children are in the resource room for nearly 60 percent of their week.

Sally Wilson is a resource room teacher who describes herself as a "jack-of-all-trades." She graduated from college in 1984; this is her second year teaching both of which have been in the Eatonton district where she is assigned to the high school. The students who came to Ms. Wilson are all assigned to her for specific periods in the day. One class is exclusively for assistance with tenth grade social studies and another is for ninth grade math. All of her periods are for general academic support either individually or on small groups. She works with students six periods a day, has one prep period, a period to coordinate her work with the other resource room teacher and subject matter teachers, and a lunch period.

The class load that Ms. Wilson carries is within recommended state figures although most of the work is highly individualized except for the social studies and math. She has 14 students in social students and 17 in math. In the remaining four periods, she has two children in each of two periods, four in one and five in her last period.

Ms. Wilson feels that she has been able to make several improvements in the resource room program. In the program which

she "inherited," students who were classified as PSEN--pupils with special educational needs--were grouped with students who had been classified as learning disabled. PSEN is an academic classification and frequently the students have attitudinal problems as well as academic ones. Learning disabled is a term reserved for students who have been through the Committee on the Handicapped and have been determined to have special educational needs. While she believes that each group of students need and deserve assistance, Ms. Wilson does not think the two should be grouped together. One of the changes she has been able to make is to separate the two groups, so that the learning disabled students do not have to compete with students whose negative attitudes about school are causing them to be behavior problems.

Another of the changes that Ms. Wilson has been able to make involves closer contact with the subject matter teachers. If a student who is having difficulty with science is assigned to her for special assistance, she meets with the science teacher to make sure that the work she is doing with the student is coordinated with the classroom work. This approach is closely tied to another change which was made in the actual work done in the resource room. Instead of doing additional skill work in materials that are not related to the subject area, all of the work Ms. Wilson does with her resource room students is tied into the classroom material. She makes a real effort to supplement rather than supplant the work that the classroom teacher is doing. The approach that Sally Wilson is using was new to the

high school, but is, we were told, fairly typical of the approach in the elementary and middle schools.

The thrust of the special education program at the Eatonton Central School appears truly to be what is "mandated" by law--i.e., placing children in the "least restrictive environment." There appear to be close working relationships between the teachers at each level and the special education teachers who work at the same level. The Committee on the Handicapped makes an effort to meet the requirements of the State Education Department. At the time of the review by the regional director from the State Education Department, the citations against Eatonton were of a procedural nature; none were matters of substance such as failing to respond to the needs of students, placing students inappropriately, or anything of this type. The one area which does seem to need improvement is in communication between the special education teachers at the different levels. It is not a need that has gone unnoticed; it is a general need expressed by administrators and by teachers throughout the district. Not all teachers agreed that they should have to know what their colleagues in other buildings are doing, but most would agree that they do not know.

The number of students identified by the Committee on the Handicapped is approximately 12 percent of the total student population. This number is well within the figure usually given or at least bantered about by administrators as an acceptable figure--10-15 percent. Anything less than ten percent implies

that the district is ignoring the needs of some students; anything over 15 percent suggests that the Committee on the Handicapped is working overtime and someone has gotten overly zealous. In sum, the special education program at the Eatonton School seems well-balanced and dedicated to meeting the needs of the students as well as possible within the means available to it.

High School Student Life

There are 397 students in the high school for the 1985-86 school year. The class enrollments vary significantly with each grade having less students than the previous year. The school district has indicated that over the past five years it has had an average of 11 drop-outs per year. According to the school district most of the drop-outs have occurred either during or just after the ninth grade year. Based on this information, Eatonton could expect a drop of nearly ten percent from the ninth to the tenth grade years. However, there is more attrition from grade to grade than can be explained from the estimated drop-outs.

In 1981 there were 101 in the freshmen class; by the time that class graduated there were only 71 in the class. In 1982 there were also 101 students in the freshmen class; there are only 72 in this year's graduating class. This year's freshmen class has 130 students, but the sophomore, junior, and senior classes have only 93, 84, and 72. The senior class is only

slightly more than half the size of the freshmen class. The school district is unable to explain the drop in size of class form freshmen year to senior year except by claiming that people are moving out of the district.

The typical advanced ninth grade student will take four required Regents courses; one each in English, math, social studies, and science. In addition to these required academic courses, the student will also take physical education and at least two electives. One of the electives will probably be a foreign language; both Spanish and French are offered. The academically-talented ninth grader may also take art, music, or one of the courses offered in the industrial arts area. Many academically-talented students will play one or more instruments and will, therefore, participate in the band and, perhaps, chorus.

By the time an academically advanced student has reached the 12th grade he or she will have probably completed all requirements for graduation except for English and social studies by the end of the first semester if not by the end of the junior year. One of the situations which is frustrating to the advanced student is not having enough courses available to fill out the senior year schedule. Either the student has taken everything that is offered that is of interest or scheduling conflicts prevent the student from taking anything else. This is a problem that is not peculiar to the Eatonton high school; it is shared by many small, rural schools.

The vocational education students follow a typical program until he or she reaches the 11th grade when work at the area vocational BOCES center may begin. Generally the vocational education student is a student who takes non-Regents courses and may choose to have business education subjects, industrial arts classes or home economics classes as the elective part of the academic day. Some vocational education students have low verbal and written skills and, therefore, may be enrolled in the special skills classes offered in English and social studies. The vocational education student completes his or her major sequence by successfully completing the course work at the area vocational center.

The student with a physical handicap is not limited in the type of course she or he may take. There may be some limitations, of course, for the student who is blind or has severe cerebral palsy, but Eatonton does not have any students with this degree of physical limitation. In recent years, provisions have been made to increase the access of the physically-handicapped to all parts of the building.

The student handbook for the high school details the opportunities available to students as well as the responsibilities they have. The majority of students are expected to be in school for the entire day which is from 7:50 am until 2:15 pm and to use transportation provided by the school district. Students who have automobiles are permitted to drive to school, but must adhere to strict rules governing the use of

the cars. In short, the student may not occupy or drive the car once it has been parked on school property and school has begun. Special permission must be given to go to a car during the school day. The only students permitted to drive with a student driver are those students who have written permission on file in the office of the principal. Permission is not transferable from one student driver to another.

Smoking is allowed under certain restrictions. It may only take place during the times and in the settings designated by the high school administration. Students who smoke must have parental permission which is kept on file in the main office. Students who have permission are issued a smokers card which identifies them as having permission. Although smoking is permitted, the policy is an effort to control the amount and place of smoking. The official position is that no one should smoke and that smoking is discouraged.

The members of the senior class and students who have achieved honor roll status are afforded special privileges. Honor roll status is achieved by earning an 85 average or above. Students who have achieved this status are given an honor pass. With this pass they are released from attending study hall during the 10m week period. In lieu of attending study hall, a student with an honor pass may go to the guidance area, the career center, the computer room, the media center or the main office. Ninth grade students may not receive honor passes until the second semester of the freshmen year. Under special

circumstances a student who has not achieved an 85 average, but has raised his or her average eight points may be given an honor pass.

The senior lounge is reserved for seniors to be used during their free time. The lounge is completely the responsibility of the seniors. They are expected to keep it in good order, to furnish and decorate it (with the approval of the administration), to establish the rules and regulations for its use, and to make sure that it is not used by the underclassmen. Any behavior which is in violation of general school rules or the rules established by the senior class may result in the closing of the senior lounge.

All students have the opportunity and are encouraged to participate in extra-curricular activities. There is a fairly wide variety of activities available to the students. For this reason, students are urged to consider their academic commitments and out-of-school obligations before deciding in which extra-curricular activities they will participate. The largest number of students participate in inter-scholastic athletics.

The girls may belong to one or more of the following teams: soccer, volleyball, basketball, softball, tennis, golf, cross country, and track and field. The girls may also belong to one of the cheerleading squads. Soccer, basketball, and softball are the primary sports for girls. Many of the girls who are athletic participate on all three teams. Tennis, bowling and golf are co-educational sports as are cross-country and track and field. A

few girls participate on the tennis, bowling and golf teams, but it is unusual to have any girls on either the track or field or cross country teams.

The primary sports for boys are football, basketball, and baseball which attract the better athletes. The secondary sports each attract about ten players who usually do not participate in any other sport. The one sport available to boys which is not available to girls is wrestling. The wrestling team is usually fairly small; sometimes not even able to compete at all weights. Since the reorganization the major sports teams have done well in their league. The success of the athletic teams was a healing factor in the crisis of reorganization.

There are several extra-curricular activities which have music as their basic component. Concert band, march band, jazz band, chorus, majorette squad, and the color guard squad are the organizations which any student with an interest and ability in music may join. The musical groups are well-subscribed with the smaller ones having about 20 members and the band and chorus having between 40 and 50 members. There is a good feeder system from the middle school and elementary instrumental and vocal music programs.

The "interest" clubs and service groups make up the remaining extra-curricular opportunities available to students. Clubs like the ski club have many members while the drama club, audio-visual club, and secretary's club only have between ten and

fifteen members. The student council has several representatives from each class and so is a large group.

Visiting the Eatonton High School one gets the impression of a well-controlled school where there is a relaxed friendly atmosphere. Students who come to the office for assistance are greeted with a helpful response by the office staff. If the student needs to see the principal, unless he is not there or is obviously busy attending to something else, he appears willing to help. The guidance office is a busy place where students are clearly welcome. The high school guidance counselor has his desk out in the open office so that he is always approachable and available to the students. Although his desk is out in the open space, there is a small office available when private conversations between the counselor are appropriate or necessary.

The school, although more than 30 years old, has been kept in good repair. After the failure of a referendum to build a new school, money was approved by the voters to renovate each of the original buildings. As a consequence, the students attend school in a building which is in good repair and is clean and orderly.

Transportation Program

The Eatonton Central School district covers slightly more than 150 square miles and is bordered by large lakes on the east and the west. East/west travel before one has first traveled either north or south (unless one limits the travel to the distance between the two lakes) is clearly impossible. While the

presence of the lakes does not affect the daily transportation of the students who attend class all day either in the Meridian building or the Batesville building, it does affect the transportation of students who attend the area vocational center at BOCES in Radisson as well as those students enrolled in a special education class who must either travel to the BOCES center or to a classroom in the Radisson City School District. In addition to affecting the daily travel of special education students and vocational educational students, the geographical constraints of the district also affect the extra-curricular activities, particularly interscholastic athletics.

The 1985-86 budget included transportation expenses of $325,216.00. This figure is 6.7 percent of the total budget. Of the $325,216.00, the district expects to receive $220,000.00 in State aid for transportation. The State aid figure is only 67 percent of the transportation expense. While the total amount spent on transportation reflects a percentage that is less than--i.e., better than--many geographically large rural districts spend on transportation, the return on the expenditure in terms of State aid received is 20 percent less than the potential amount that could be received. The school district is presently receiving approximately 70 percent out of a potential 90 percent transportation aid. The district may not be able to increase this figure because of the way in which children are scattered throughout the district. However, every effort must continue to be made each year to insure that all components of the

transportation aid formula are bringing in the highest return possible.

The school district runs 20 am and pm routes daily; ten each for the K-8 students and the 7-12 students. The longest runs are the routes which take students into the area vocational center at BOCES. The morning run is 77.5 miles while the afternoon run is 74.2 miles. (No student travels this far, however.) The difference is accounted for in the pick-up and drop-off points.

All of the school district's buses are 60 or 66 passenger buses with the exception of two wheelchair vehicles which have a capacity of 13 students plus two wheelchairs and a nine passenger suburban which was purchased in April, 1985. The district has a bus replacement program and has gotten voter approval to continue purchasing one to two buses each year.

The transportation problems facing the Eatonton School District are typical of rural schools of similar geographical size and student population. To receive maximum state aid, theoretically, every bus seat must be filled on either the morning or the afternoon run. However, for a district with a sparsity factor of 8.5, this is an impossibility, particularly with buses that have a capacity of either 60 or 66 passengers. To fill every seat would make the bus route so long that the recommended length and time would be significantly exceeded.

To buy smaller buses is not a realistic solution since the district population is declining and the district will probably reach the point where it gives serious consideration to bring all

students to school at one time--i.e., eliminate nearly half of the current runs. Buying smaller buses would mean that when the district reaches the point of being able to bring all students in on one run, the buses would not have sufficient capacity. In and of itself, there are problems associated with bringing all students in at one time. Among them are the concerns that parents invariably voice about having kindergartners and first graders on the buses with senior high school students. Additionally, the bus driver's work is essentially cut in half and this presents the problem of finding people who are willing to work for half of what they might receive if there were two full runs.

A school district like the Eatonton School District is in a difficult position when it comes to student transportation. It is too small to fill every seat on the buses and too large to go to one bus run. It is too large geographically to reduce the number of buses on each run and also the wrong size to reduce the size of the buses themselves. Recent changes in the transportation aid formula which have allowed some expenses that were previously excluded have helped to move Eatonton closer to the magic 90% aid on allowable expenses. However, until something is done which recognizes that there are certain districts that simply cannot meet the recommended maximums of 35 miles and one hour length there will not be parity in transportation aid for a district like Eatonton. Perhaps there is some way in which a district that is running routes close to

or at the recommended maximums receive credit for a full bus although each seat is not filled.

The Chief School Officer

There have been five chief school officers in the Eatonton Central School District since it was reorganized in 1968, not including other district administrators who served in acting capacities while the new chief school officer was being selected. Only one person served more than two years and he was able to stay nearly nine years before his contract was not renewed by the Board of Education. The present chief school officer was appointed in February, 1983 and began his tenure on July 1 of that same year.

Only two members of the Board of Education were members when the present superintendent was hired. Those two persons have maintained their positions of power and, at least one of them, seems very reluctant to give it up and, to date, has had no reason to think that he is even being challenged. The new members of the Board of Education raise questions about the educational programs and other issues that relate directly to services to children and, based on interviews and comments made at Board of Education meetings, seem interested in educational matters.

The current superintendent believes that more progress has been made toward finally bringing the school system together in the two years of his administration than had previously occurred.

He cites several processes he has instituted as reasons for this assessment. He has created opportunities for the teachers from the two buildings to visit in the other building during the academic day and participate in the educational program. He has established working committees which have teacher members from across all levels of the program. And, he has been able to re-establish a parent-school organization.

One of the teachers does not agree that quite so much progress has been made. His opinion is that most of the teachers see the visits between schools as somewhat pointless and something that takes them away from their responsibilities in their own building. It is also felt that the outcome of the committees is really pre-determined and the committees' purpose is to make it look as though there is involvement. It is difficult to assess to what degree this teacher accurately reflects the opinions of the entire faculty. However, informal conversations with faculty members seem to support his assessment.

Although the superintendent and the teachers have differing perceptions about some of the activities going on in the school district, the effort is being made to have the system become more cohesive. It will take more than the evidence that is presently available to make the final assessment.

The research completed in this case study has examined the dynamics of governance in a small, rural school district that was formed as the result of a merger of two even smaller districts.

The entire history of the school district has been examined from the time of the vote on the merger through the School Board elections and budget vote in June, 1985--a period of 17 years. The focus of the research was on political participation in the process of governance and the impact that participation had on the way in which the district and the Board of Education operated.

This is one final irony in the story of the Eatonton Central School. Had school district officials and the State Education Department understood the impact of reorganization as fully in the 1970's as they do now perhaps the two school districts would not have been so persistently encouraged to merge. This would have saved an enormous amount in both human costs and monetary ones.

The period of the 1960's was one of the peak periods in school district reorganization. Following the 1958 revision of The Master Plan for School District Reorganization, school administrators across the State took their initiative from the State and began fostering mergers. From 1962 through 1969, 351 school districts were involved in reorganization. Equalization of educational opportunity, increased educational opportunities, and greater efficiency and economy in operation were the standard advantages ascribed to reorganization.

After 1970 the number of mergers dropped dramatically--from 351 schools in a seven year period in the 1960's to 24 schools for the entire next decade. This precipitous drop caused the

State Education Department to step back and take another look at reorganization. What was found was that (1) the financial incentives to reorganization were having a negligible impact on the willingness of districts to reorganize, and (2) the non-educational and financial issues surrounding reorganization were not as important to the communities as ones which concerned the social and emotional development of students and the district residents' opportunity to participate in the governance of the system.

In an internal memo prepared for State Education Department officials, it was stated that:

> The new concerns which appear to have more importance compared to those of the past as voters make their decisions center around these areas: A concern that the changed district organization will have an undesirable influence upon the development of the social and personality characteristics of the students. A concern that the changed district organization must not result in any decrease in the responsiveness of the schools to the clients,... that there must be open communications, and a high degree of community involvement in planning and policy development, ... a strong feeling of satisfaction.

In recognizing that these new areas of concern were of importance to communities, the State Education Department acknowledged what many school district residents, including those from Eatonton, had been trying to make them understand.

What would have happen in two small rural districts in central New York had the total impact of reorganization been appreciated and understood can only be conjectured. It seems

plausible, however, to suggest that reorganization would have been delayed and the turmoil which developed over the procedural issues surrounding the reorganization could have been avoided. Students have had the advantages of specialized services and a greater variety of courses than they probably would have had if the two districts had remained separate. One must wonder how much of the human effort that was spent in the conflict over reorganization and in adapting to the frequent turnover in administrators and Board members might have been more productively spent in building a new school district. Had the two school districts waited until the mid-1970's to consider reorganization, they would have done so under different circumstances. The State Education Department would have been more sensitive to the issues concerning local control and governance and would have balanced these with the educational and financial issues. The enrollment in the two districts would have declined to the point that merger would have seemed a more reasonable option than it did when the districts were at a high point in enrollment. Additionally, the issues surrounding the building program would not have been part of the reorganization discussion since there would no longer have been the need for a new building. On balance, the reorganization of the Batesville and Meridian Central School Districts into the Eatonton Central District paid dividends, but more sensitivity to the issues of concern to the residents and a better sense of timing would have made a very difficult and trying period very much less so.